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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of gifted minority children are considered (including a physical rather than aural learning style, external rather than internal orientation, and a preference for inductive over deductive reasoning) and requirements for training teachers to work with this population are discussed. Addressed are the importance of training regarding nontraditional identification of gifted minority students, human relations and empathetic understanding, a base of multicultural education or cultural pluralism, and the ability to make program adjustments for specific children. Practicum experiences are seen as very important. (CL)

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SOME CONSIDERATIONS IN THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS FOR THE GIFTED MINORITY CHILD

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INTRODUCTION

"The gifted and talented is a minority distinguished not by race, socioeconomic background, ethnic origin, or impaired powers, but by its exceptional ability. Its members come from all levels of society, from all races and nationalities, and from both sexes in about equal numbers." (Lyon, 1981).

Correll (1978) stated, "as a group, the gifted constitute a largely unidentified minority that cuts across all economic, social, racial, cultural, age, sex and occupational segments of society."

Cruickshank (1975) also agrees that "high mental ability and creativity are found among people of all races, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic levels. Although research on disadvantaged gifted is somewhat limited poverty and cultural deprivation, not race, seems to be the more significant factors inhibiting growth and expression of potential."

The gifted is a minority in and of itself. Some of the gifted comprise a minority within a minority because they "fall outside the mainstream of society's dominant culture" (Correll, 1978). Examples are the poor white gifted child from the rural South, the poor black gifted child from the rural South, the black gifted in the ghetto, the American Indian, Mexican migrant children in Texas and California and delinquent youth in large cities.

Gowan (1979) states that for the bright child cultural disadvantage operates much like emotional disturbance. "It tends to flatten out his peak performance and to make it inconsistent, keeping it below test potential."

For those reasons the term minority is used in this paper to include all the gifted who because of poverty and deprivation are less likely

to be identified as gifted and are less likely to display the typical characteristics of gifted which Seagoe (1978) enumerated as:

1. Keen power of observation, naive receptivity; sense of the significant; willingness to examine the unusual.

2. Powers of abstraction, conceptualization, synthesis; interest in inductive learning and problem solving; pleasure in intellectual activity.

3. Interest in cause-effect relations and ability to see relationships; interest in applying concepts; love and truth.

4. Liking for structure and order; liking for consistency, as in value systems, number systems, clocks, calendars.

5. Retentiveness.

6. Verbal proficiency, large vocabulary; facility in expression; interest in reading; breadth of information in advanced areas.

7. Questioning attitude - intellectual curiosity, inquistitive mind, intrinsic motivation.

8. Power of critical thinking; skepticism, evaluative testing; self-criticism and self-checking.

9. Creativeness and inventiveness; liking for new ways of doing things; interest in creating; brainstorming, freewheeling.

10. Power of concentration; intense attention that excludes all else; long attention span.

11. Persistent, goal-directed behavior.

12. Sensitivity, intuitiveness, empathy for others; need for emotional support and a sympathetic attitude.

13. High energy, alertness, eagerness; periods of intense voluntary effort preceding invention.

14. Independence in work and study; preference for individualized work; self-reliance; need for freedom of movement and action.

15. Versatility and virtuosity; diversity of interests and abilities; many hobbies; proficiency in art forms such as music and drawing.

16. Friendliness and outgoingness.

Instead the gifted minority child is more likely to display the following characteristics: Physical rather than aural learning style; content centered instead of form centered; externally oriented rather than introspective; problem centered rather than abstract centered; inductive rather than deductive; spatial rather than temporal; and slow and patient rather than quick and flexible (Gowan, 1979).

In looking at the minority gifted, one may also use the definition established by the U.S. Office of Education:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:
>
> 1. general intellectual ability
> 2. specific academic aptitude
> 3. creative or productive thinking
> 4. leadership ability
> 5. visual and performing arts
> 6. psychomotor ability (Marland, 1971)

Considerations in Teacher Training

One major consideration in teacher training should be the identification of the gifted minority child since his charactersitics are not consistent with the characteristics of the non-minority gifted. Torrance (1977) states that "there is a great deal of giftedness among the culturally different, and the waste or underuse of these resources is tragic."

Bruch (1970) proposed that a different set of criteria be used to identify the culturally different gifted child.

1. The primary identification criterion should be that a child exhibit outstanding powers in one or more abilities valued by his culture; the degree to which he manifests these abilities should be related both to national and to local cultural norms.

2. The secondary criterion would be that applicable to the usual identification; he should measure on national norms on both ability and achievement approximately at "bright average" levels or better.

3. A special consideration should be given to those children with demonstrated creativity.

4. Children who show social leadership potentials should also be given special consideration as having a quality strengthening their identification as gifted.

Since "evidence of gifted and talented abilities may be determined by a multiplicity of ways," (Marland, 19 9), teachers should be able to use multiple criteria including both objective measures and professional evaluation measures to identify the gifted minority. In addition to intelligence and achievement testing, nominations by teachers, parents, peers, self, creativity testing, and identification by experts, "separate checklists may facilitate identification strategies" (Correll, 1978) for the gifted minority child.

Lindsey (1980) stated:

> Unless gifted persons are identified early and provisions made for the development of their great potential, it is likely that they will succumb all too readily to what is to them ritual, routine, and low expectancies in a school setting, develop feelings of boredom, and fail to recognize and use the special talents they possess.

Correll (1978) states that "the teacher is undoubtedly the key to effective programs for gifted and talented students." Special preparation for teachers is necessary if programs are to be successful. According to Lindsey (1980) the base of knowledge must include human development, processes of learning, content to be taught, and teaching processes, in addition to knowledge "of self and sensitivity to others."

Probably most, if not all teacher training programs for the gifted adequately cover the knowledge base required. Other authorities, including Gowan (1979) and Lyon (1981) agree that the human relations - the sensitivity to others - is of primary importance. Gowan stresses the importance of human relations area in respect to the gifted disadvantaged. He discusses many aspects of human relations including "the personal stimulation of a teacher who believes" in the child and expects him to do his best. He concludes that the personal relationships in a learning situation are "more lasting in memory than skills or subject matter," and that interactive relationships between teacher and student are essential.

According to research reported by Lyon (1981), the research of Carl R. Rogers which determined traits of the successful therapist is applicable to teachers of the gifted and talented. Basically, these traits are:

> . . . genuineness: the ability to be human with strengths and weaknesses, to be genuine with students. . .
> . . . emphathic understanding: the ability of the teacher to put herself or himself in a student's shoes.
> . . . prizing: the opposite of apathy. It's caring enough about the uniqueness of an individual to celebrate that uniqueness.

Research results showed that teachers high in emphatic understanding tended to demonstrate the other traits; that students with emphatic teachers had higher achievement scores; and that high empathy teachers tended to have "greater influence on students the earlier the students were exposed to them."

If one asks himself, "Which teacher do I remember best?", generally the answer is the one who saw us as individuals, not just as students.

Teachers of the gifted must be trained to exhibit the traits of the successful therapist/teacher as described by Rogers. These teachers are dealing with the gifted as a minority and must have an understanding of the culture and background of the students they teach. Although this is an area open for further research, the writer is of the opinion that sensitivity to others and awareness of others as individuals should be a goal of and a process in the teacher training program for the gifted minority child.

Gowan (1979) believes that if teachers are to be successful with the disadvantaged gifted, the teacher must tailor the program so that the disadvantaged gifted receive:

1. Individual guidance to change self-concept;
2. Group guidance for the maintenance of morale; and
3. Remedial skills taught under special learning conditions by sympathetic teachers.

Gowan, Rogers, and Lyon are moving in the same direction. They are saying that in order for the teacher of the gifted minority to become the best facilitator of learning, programs must be developed to provide the teacher trainees with a base of multi-cultural education or cultural pluralism. The teacher training programs must provide the preservice teachers opportunities to develop sensitivity to others. The essential uniqueness of individuals must be stressed and the teachers-to-be must become acquainted with the experiential background of those they would teach.

Based on the characteristics of the culturally different child, the teacher must be able to make program adjustments for that child. Table I shows some of the required adjustments.

TABLE I
Program Adjustments for the Culturally Different Gifted

Physical and visual rather than aural	Presentation of materials should be concrete and a minimum amount of time devoted to teacher lecture or extended discussions; i.e., students should do experiments or go on field trips prior to discussions of general concepts. Role playing an effective device.
Content centered rather than form centered	The emphasis on inquiry training and creativity should be replaced, at least initially, by what is to be learned. The learning of a process or method of attack in problem solving is a more abstract concept and these students often not ready to consider that.
Externally oriented rather than introspective	Children from limited verbal environments tend not to be introverted or introspective and will not respond well to requests for self-examination of their own feelings or thoughts. Require the stimulation of concrete, external sources.
Problem centered rather than abstract centered	Should be presented with specific situations which only gradually lead to inductive thinking. The use of academic games and role playing bring forth the concrete and motoric response.
Slow, careful and patient rather than quick, clever and flexible	There is a temptation to skip steps and leap forward with gifted students. This should be resisted and a methodical orderly progression from one step to the next needed.
Need for structure and control	The elements of progressive education such as permissiveness, introspection, flexibility and lack of stress on discipline and authority illsuited to this group. There is a need for firmness and structure, particularly in the beginning program stages.

Source: Adapted from F. Riessman. "The Slow Gifted Child." In J. Gallagher (Ed.), Teaching Gifted Students. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965, p. 284.

This should not be a difficult task for the teacher if the teacher training program has included the knowledge bases mentioned earlier, identification and charactersitics of the gifted minority and if the teacher has developed the interpersonal relationships previously discussed.

Gallagher and Kinney (1974) made the following recommendations to meet the educational needs of culturally disadvantaged gifted students:

1. The need for the dominant culture to show more respect for cultural pluralism in the educational program. The American culture has been enriched by contributions from many different ethnic and racial groups. A school program presenting only a portrait of northern European culture is inappropriate in that it narrows the view of our society and discourages children of different backgrounds from making a full contribution.

2. The need of schools to make fuller use of the resources of the total community by bringing in persons who may not have had formal education but who have outstanding talent. They could inspire and motivate gifted children of their own cultural backgrounds.

3. A need to recruit and train persons who could apply understanding and knowledge of cultural pluralism for special programs. It is necessary to use more effectively the special talents of culturally different youngsters. Their talents are more often hidden by different attitudes and behavior patterns than are those found among the middle-class gifted.

4. There was an identified need to use political influence in an organized fashion to get the special needs of minority groups before the general public.

If it is true as Wyne and O'Conner (1979) stated that "the state of professional training of teachers for the gifted is a national disgrace," then the state of professional training of teachers for the gifted minority must be even worse.

As a final consideration, it may be that the overall program goals of teacher training for the gifted and the gifted minority are the same. Tompkins and Stahl (1976) suggested that "the overall goal of programs

could be to train teachers to assess, function, and maintain an appropriate and supportive educational milieu for gifted children."

From a review of the literature and personal evaluation, the curriculum for teachers in training should be expanded to include:

1. Non-traditional methods of identifying the gifted minority child.

2. A study of the cultures of the subgroups of the gifted minority.

3. Practicum experiences with the minority (culturally disadvantaged) gifted.

4. Experiences to develop personal characteristics needed by teachers to insure the full development of potential.

These are some of the considerations that in the opinion of this writer should be addressed by teacher training programs for the gifted minority child.

In no way was this presentation inclusive of all the considerations involved in a teacher training program. In agreement with Kirk and Gallagher (1979) "clearly we are still in the initial stages of finding constructive answers to the educational problems of the culturally different gifted child."

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